

How to Defend Western Europe

Instead of trying to catch up with the Soviet Union in tanks and artillery, NATO should adopt a radically new plan based on "nutcracker" and "silver bullets."

by PALMER OSBORN and WILLIAM BOWEN

Despite the well-known human tendency to avoid seeing unpleasant realities, a great many Americans and Europeans are aware these days of the need to strengthen the defenses of Western Europe. The growing Soviet preponderance in tanks, artillery, and even tactical aircraft has reached a point, after all, where only a truly determined reality-avoider could ignore it—three to one in tanks, for example. In 1976, a Belgian general jolted his NATO colleagues by publishing a book in which he declared that if Soviet forces invaded Western Europe they could reach the Rhine in forty-eight hours. They probably couldn't do that, but few high officers in NATO think it would take more than a couple of weeks, unless NATO used nuclear weapons.

That the Russians and their Warsaw Pact allies are capable of sweeping through Western Europe does not mean they will do so, of course. Ask a NATO general whether he thinks the Russians will march west within the next few years, and you are likely to get some such reply as "Why should they?" Why indeed? As long as the Soviet capacity to attack is growing faster than NATO's capacity to defend, the Russians have good reason to think that time is on their side.

Even so, there are grave perils in a military imbalance that permits the Russians to believe their forces could roll to the Rhine in a few days or a few weeks. The stronger the Soviet bloc is relative to NATO, the likelier the Soviet Union will be to use intimidation as an instrument of policy, to stir trouble around the world, and to risk a confrontation that could lead to war.

NATO planners, to be sure, envision using nuclear weapons if Soviet forces succeed in breaking through conventional defenses. But NATO's current nuclear posture is self-intimidating. If nuclear firepower were used against targets on Warsaw Pact territory, the almost certain response would be nuclear attacks against targets on NATO territory. NATO would have raised the level of violence without gaining anything. Indeed, NATO might very well be worse off militarily than before—for one thing, because its forces depend on a comparatively small number of installations, most of which are quite vulnerable to nuclear attack. A different use

of nuclear firepower, to attack invading forces on NATO territory, might not provoke a nuclear reply, but NATO's present tactical nuclear weapons systems would do severe collateral damage.

It is hoped that NATO's intention to use tactical nuclear weapons will deter the Soviet Union from attacking, but to deter effectively, a threat must be credible. Why should Soviet planners believe that NATO will use tactical nuclear weapons when it has more to lose than to gain?

There are those who argue that if the members of NATO had the will to do so, they could avoid the need to rely on tactical nuclear weapons by straightforwardly acquiring more divisions, tanks, artillery, and tactical aircraft. After all, the NATO countries together have more people and more industrial capacity than the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. But this is not a realistic alternative. The Soviet Union, unwilling to give up its numerical advantages in armaments, would undoubtedly run faster to stay ahead. The resulting arms race would be enormously expensive. It would further heighten tensions and animosities between the two sides, and intensify social strains within the NATO countries. Public opinion would not support such a course.

Instead of trying to catch up in a race in which the Soviet Union is far ahead, it would make very much more sense to adopt new defense concepts involving a different mix of armaments—in effect, starting a new race in which the advantage inherently lies with NATO. And that is precisely what this article proposes. NATO can build an effective defense system at acceptable year-in, year-out peacetime cost by doing the following:

- Adopt new defense plans, emphasizing highly efficient weapons—specifically, precision-guided munitions.
- Adopt a new, clearly defined doctrine of limited nuclear war.
- Deploy a new mix of weapons systems that fits the new plans and doctrine. No technological breakthroughs are required—the appropriate systems are within the reach of present technology.

The primary need is a NATO defense posture—a combination of plans, forces, and weapons—that could stop a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. NATO's quintessential problem from the moment Soviet forces begin an invasion is to incapacitate the invaders' primary fighting formations, armored or mechanized maneuver battalions. Nearly 900 of these are stationed in or near East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the Warsaw Pact countries that border the central sector of NATO. Most have around

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500 men, and are divided into three companies. Counting tanks, personnel carriers, self-propelled artillery, and all other vehicles within division forces, there are roughly 200 self-propelled vehicles per maneuver battalion.

In sum, NATO's first need is to maintain in place, year in and year out, military punch capable of incapacitating up to several thousand companies and artillery batteries, and up to, say, 180,000 self-propelled vehicles on which these depend to move and fight, during the first few days or weeks of an invasion. NATO forces must be able to do this even though Soviet leaders choose when and where to attack, and even though Warsaw Pact forces continue to hold overall advantages in numbers of tanks, artillery, and tactical aircraft.

NATO can acquire such capabilities by shaping its defenses around a concept that has come to be called "nutcracker"—because, figuratively, this defense crushes invader forces between two classes of firepower. One class consists of "area" munitions, each capable of destroying most of the troops and matériel within a radius of several hundred feet—roughly the area occupied by a company or battery. The other class consists of munitions that destroy individual combat vehicles one at a time. If NATO forces can knock out most of the invaders' vehicles, it can stop the invasion. Particularly when moving, vehicles are relatively easy to detect with modern sensors. Moreover, like checkers advanced on a checkerboard, the most forward elements of the invasion forces represent the largest "sunk investment" of military effort.

A defense that can utilize both classes of munitions presents a company or battery in the invading forces with a dilemma. The more it coalesces into tight formations to provide mutual fire support and to fight through a defense position rapidly, the more losses it will suffer to each area munition the defense hits it with. Conversely, the more it spreads out for protection against area munitions, the more time and room the defenders will have to employ antivehicle munitions, and the less firepower the attackers will be able to concentrate against any particular defense unit.

In the nutcracker defense, the primary weapons for knocking out individual invader vehicles are precision-guided munitions, or PGM's. NATO already has a variety of PGM's in operation. Dragons and TOW's, for example, are guided to their targets by gunners who steer them by commands transmitted through wires spun out in flight. The Maverick missile, delivered from an aircraft, contains its own optical target-sensing system, which a member of the aircrew "locks on" to the image of the intended target.

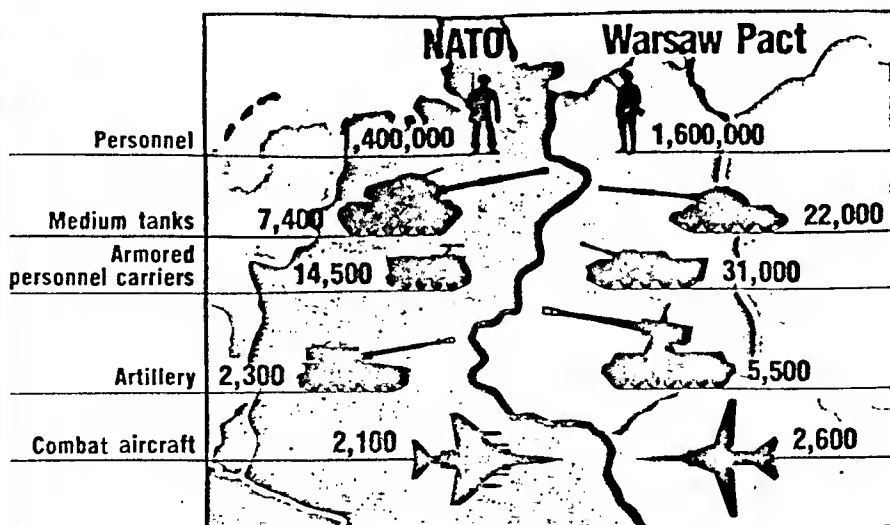
Thereafter, the Maverick's own sensor, sending signals to the missile's control system, pursues the target to impact. In such ways, under conditions that allow them to operate as intended, a large percentage of PGM's that are launched destroy their targets. Current PGM's have significant limitations—for one thing, the span of natural conditions within which they can perform effectively is still too narrow. But incremental technical improvements and new operating methods can overcome most of the limitations.

PGM's are expensive—detractors scathingly call them "silver bullets." But in the perspective of long-term cost-effectiveness, they are much less expensive than free-flight shells and bombs, huge quantities of which must be delivered per target destroyed. In actual engagements pitting artillery against tanks, for example, roughly 2,500 artillery rounds have been fired per tank destroyed. Since PGM's provide a very high proportion of hits, you need far fewer of them to do a given amount of damage to enemy forces. Since you need far fewer firings, you need far less investment in delivery systems. Accordingly, there are large savings on maintenance and operations.

Although they are acquiring PGM's in growing numbers, the U.S. armed forces have not begun to exploit the potential savings. For the most part, PGM firepower is merely added on to the existing framework of force structures and modes of operation. When forces are redesigned around PGM firepower, silver bullets will prove to be very efficient.

Area munitions for a nutcracker defense must be far more potent than antivehicle munitions, of course. Non-nuclear munitions that would, in effect, "carpet bomb" company-size areas with fléchettes—fluted or finned metal darts—might prove adequate. However, an effective area munition based on a fléchette concept would weigh several tons at least. This is one of a number of reasons to choose instead a small nuclear warhead, with a yield of less than a kiloton (equivalent to 1,000 tons of TNT). Compared with conventional munitions, delivered with equal accuracy, a nuclear munition can be better adapted to small delivery systems that are more economical and that can exploit mobility and concealment more effectively. And sub-kiloton nuclear weapons would do little collateral damage.

The famous "neutron bomb" is not at issue here. Whatever merits it might have in other uses, it would not have any special value as a low-yield area weapon in the nutcracker defense. Indeed, a sub-kiloton neutron bomb is a contradiction in terms, because a neutron bomb requires a sizable fission-bomb trigger.



ON THE CENTRAL FRONT NATO IS OVERMATCHED

When attackers and defenders are roughly equal in quantity and quality of armaments, the advantage lies with the defenders. But in Central Europe today, the Warsaw Pact's margin in heavy armaments is so lopsided that it threatens to overwhelm the natural advantages of the defense. The imbalance is most striking in tanks. The illustration shows figures for medium tanks because these now predominate in most armies. (The Warsaw Pact has some heavy tanks that are regarded as obsolescent; light tanks are of major importance only in the French Army.) NATO equipment has generally been of better quality than that of the Warsaw Pact, but this margin has narrowed in recent years. And production trends threaten to worsen the already serious quantitative gaps.

Nuclear devices in current European stockpiles could be used as area munitions in the nutcracker defense, but their average yield—more than twenty kilotons—is much higher than is necessary or desirable. A simplified, single-purpose warhead, based on current technology, would be much more satisfactory. Those who shrink from the proposed use of low-yield nuclear warheads as area weapons should bear in mind that NATO already has much larger tactical nuclear weapons, and plans for using them. The maximum number of company and battery targets that NATO would have to incapacitate with area munitions in the nutcracker defense would be only a fraction of the much-publicized number of 7,000 nuclear devices thought to reside in NATO's current stockpile. More important, the maximum total yield that NATO's forces would have capacity to deliver in this defense would be no more than a few percent of what is thought to be the total yield in that stockpile.

Whatever kind of area weapons NATO adopts, the alliance must be prepared to conduct its defense within a framework of nuclear doctrine that will discourage escalation, enable NATO forces to use nuclear weapons without excessive risk, and overcome any impressions that NATO cannot afford to defend itself. These requirements can be met with a purely defensive doctrine providing that:

1. Under no circumstances whatsoever will NATO be the first to employ nuclear firepower against targets on someone else's sovereign territory.
2. If Warsaw Pact forces invade NATO territory, NATO will meet the invasion with all effective firepower, including sub-kiloton nuclear weapons.
3. If Warsaw Pact forces employ nuclear firepower against targets within NATO territory, NATO will retaliate in kind against targets on Pact territory.

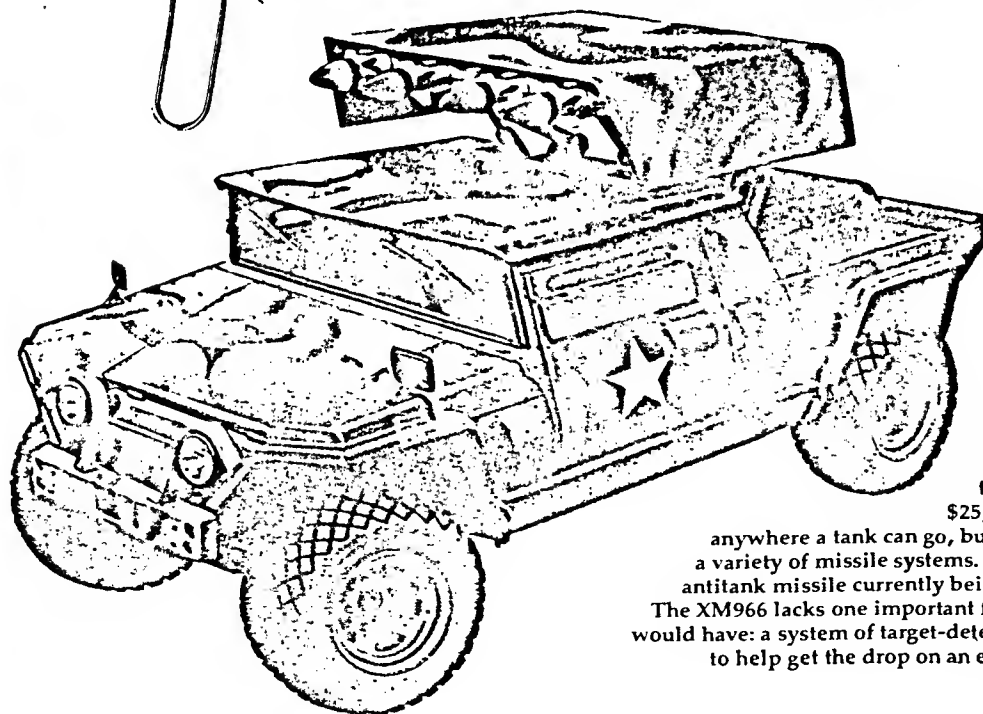
To help make it credible that NATO does not intend to be the first to use nuclear firepower beyond its territory, the warheads and delivery systems for use in carrying out the third provision should be separate from NATO's direct defenses, and designed to survive even in the event that Warsaw Pact forces were to employ nuclear firepower on

NATO territory. They might, for example, be sequestered offshore on NATO submarines.

Adoption of this nuclear doctrine would, among other things, eliminate a grave defect in NATO's present defense posture. NATO counts on using tactical nuclear weapons in defending against a Soviet invasion, but the decision to use such weapons—a decision made hours or days after the invasion began—would represent a deliberate and perilous escalation of the level of violence. Under the proposed doctrine, in contrast, NATO's use of low-yield nuclear weapons against invading forces would not represent escalation: it would be a manifestly defensive response that had been clearly and openly declared in advance. The burden of then deciding whether to escalate would fall upon the Soviet Union rather than upon NATO.

One exceedingly important benefit of the new nuclear doctrine would be a gain in credibility. NATO's present nuclear doctrine, with its haziness about when, where, and whether nuclear weapons would be employed, leaves room for Soviet leaders to doubt whether in fact the NATO political leaders of the moment would muster the nerve to authorize the use of nuclear force. Enhanced credibility would strengthen deterrence. Faced with an assured nuclear response from which NATO had more to gain than to lose, the Soviet Union would be less likely to regard invading Western Europe as a rational course of action. And if the Soviet Union nonetheless decided at some point to send military forces rolling into West Germany, nutcracker defense and the new nuclear doctrine would greatly improve NATO's prospects of halting the invasion.

Swift response would be all-important. Soviet military doctrine makes it quite clear that a Soviet invasion would be a sudden surge, aimed at breaking through defenses and rendering NATO's military position hopeless before the alliance could mobilize and deploy its reserves. NATO forces would have to halt the initial surge of Warsaw Pact forces within a short time to keep them from reaching the Rhine or even the English Channel.



THE PGM DUNE BUGGY IS ALMOST HERE

A vehicle specially designed as a "PGM dune buggy" (see text) does not yet exist, but if it did, it would closely resemble this FMC Corp. XM966, which does exist as a real, drivable, and well-tested vehicle. The XM966 costs less than \$25,000, without armament. It can go almost anywhere a tank can go, but much faster. It can be fitted with any of a variety of missile systems. This particular XM966 packs the Hellfire antitank missile currently being developed by Rockwell International. The XM966 lacks one important feature that a complete PGM dune buggy would have: a system of target-detection sensors that the crew could elevate to help get the drop on an enemy tank or armored personnel carrier.

Fortunately, the defense has some inherent advantages. In order to break through resolute defenders armed with modern weapons, the attackers have to mass in tight formations. The unavoidable clumping makes company-size invader units profitable targets for low-yield nuclear weapons. These weapons would be mostly missiles with sub-kiloton warheads. To attack more dispersed invader units, mobile antivehicle forces with PGM's would move in, augmenting NATO's limited numbers of more conventional armored and mechanized units. Antivehicle forces, in the field in large numbers; would also assist NATO tanks and self-propelled artillery held in reserve in attacking Soviet units that succeeded in breaking through.

Once the attrition of vehicles brought the initial Soviet surge to a halt, the NATO forces would have secured an important edge. Soviet military doctrine assumes a short war, and the forces are equipped and organized for a short war. The other side of the Soviet emphasis on overpowering punch and quick knockout is a relative weakness in supply and maintenance—the Soviet forces, as defense analyst Phillip A. Karber has put it, are short on "logistical stamina." Within a couple of weeks, breakdowns of vehicles and local shortages of supplies would begin to drag on the invading forces. The war would not be over, but assuming that NATO had made prudent preparations for keeping replacements and supplies flowing, there would be some prospect of eventually forcing the invaders to withdraw from NATO territory. It is difficult to imagine such an outcome with NATO's present doctrines and forces.

Systems for delivering munitions in the nutcracker defense could avoid certain difficulties associated with present defense plans and weaponry. For example, to deliver most or all of its area munitions, NATO could use missiles with range enough to

reach of invader artillery. Since NATO would use separate systems to locate and track targets for these munitions, and to assist in guiding them, ranges of 100 miles or more would be practical. Greater range enables delivery systems to serve a wider area, so NATO could bring a larger fraction of its inventory to bear on a particular invader path than would be possible with artillery. By basing the missiles on wheeled vehicles that could be moved readily and concealed effectively, NATO could secure them better from air and missile attacks and assure that Soviet planners could not count on neutralizing a large fraction of NATO's defensive firepower with preemptive attacks.

Delivery systems for antivehicle PGM's will be of several kinds. Some PGM's will be launched from aircraft and some from ground platforms or positions. Most will function best as direct-fire weapons, released from their carriers or positions only when their targets are within fairly close ranges—a few miles and sometimes less than one mile. For these weapons, NATO must employ fast and nimble launch platforms that it can acquire and maintain in large numbers. Most PGM ground and air platforms would not be billeted or based in fixed or exposed positions, or within range of invader artillery. When summoned, they would drive or fly rapidly to where they are needed. In order to be able to channel a large portion of NATO's inventories of PGM's and delivery vehicles to sectors that are under attack, NATO should free these armaments from traditional fixed-sector, specific-unit assignments and use them instead as quick-reaction floating reserves.

For this role, any of several air and ground vehicles already existing in experimental versions could be adapted for use as mobile launch platforms for PGM's. Deploy-

These new approaches would help assure that Soviet planners cannot contrive a quick victory in Europe.

NATO to offset the Warsaw Pact's forbidding numerical advantages in tanks and artillery—and to do so at tolerable cost. The ground vehicle—call it the “PGM dune buggy”—need not require any new technology. It would be a wheeled vehicle that could travel readily through fields and gullies when necessary. A vehicle that could move much more quickly than tanks, and from greater distances, to reinforce defenders who are under attack by superior numbers of Warsaw Pact tanks and artillery. A vehicle smaller and quieter than most combat vehicles. A \$25,000-class vehicle instead of a \$1-million-class tank. Equipped with sensors that a gunner could elevate when necessary, such a vehicle should enable its crew to get the drop on enemy combat vehicles in most encounters.

To be ready to employ a tank in wartime, NATO must maintain crews of three to five full-time soldiers in peacetime, as well as full-time soldier-mechanics and military shop facilities. To be ready to employ a PGM dune buggy, NATO need maintain in peacetime only a single full-time soldier-gunner for each crew. Reserves could drive these vehicles, and civilian auto shops could maintain them. A PGM dune buggy could travel more than ten times as far as a tank on a given portion of fuel. The spare-parts inventories would be smaller. Unlike tanks, PGM dune buggies could be transported by air in militarily significant numbers to meet urgent reinforcement needs at extended distances.

By introducing PGM dune buggies in large numbers, NATO would be making a profound change in the armored and mechanized forces it now counts on heavily to stop an invasion. In the nutcracker concept, these forces would be re-equipped and reconstituted as lighter, more mobile forces with many more wheeled vehicles armed with antivehicle PGM's, and less artillery and fewer tanks.

All this runs directly counter to prevailing opinion. According to the conventional wisdom, we should endeavor to meet NATO ground-force deficiencies by adding more tanks and artillery. But the doctrine that it takes tanks and artillery to cope with enemy tanks and artillery indicates a mistaken conception of NATO's real choices. The practical effect is to perpetuate the Warsaw Pact's advantages and assure that NATO ground forces will be outgunned in engagements concluded before NATO can reinforce.

The nutcracker defense, in contrast, should enable NATO to bring to bear enough antivehicle PGM's to incapacitate invader forces before they can reach significant objectives. The defenders would rely less on artillery to limit losses to Soviet artillery and more on PGM attacks on vehicles that

move or support Soviet artillery. To reduce losses of their own ground vehicles to artillery fire, NATO forces would rely on tactics that minimize the amount of time PGM dune buggies spend in the fire zone.

Aircraft would play essential roles in the nutcracker defense. NATO would depend on air operations to locate targets for area munitions and to deliver some of its antivehicle PGM's. To keep these operations from being severely disrupted, NATO should take measures to reduce dependence on long first-class runways and on amenities that can be provided only by fixed installations susceptible to interdiction.

The most promising measure would be to employ kinds of aircraft that can be launched, recovered, and supported from any of thousands of sites. Remotely piloted aircraft are a particularly attractive potential solution. In addition to aggravating Soviet interdiction difficulties, they could reduce NATO's peacetime annual force costs by a large percentage. Aircraft of this kind, however, must yet be proved practical and flexible enough for adverse combat and weather conditions. Meanwhile, British and American experiments with first-generation Harrier aircraft have shown that vertical and short takeoff and landing (VSTOL) aircraft offer a possible interim solution. Nutcracker air operations could be based upon either of these classes of aircraft, because the operations would not require the large payloads and supersonic performance that tie many modern combat aircraft to large fixed air bases.

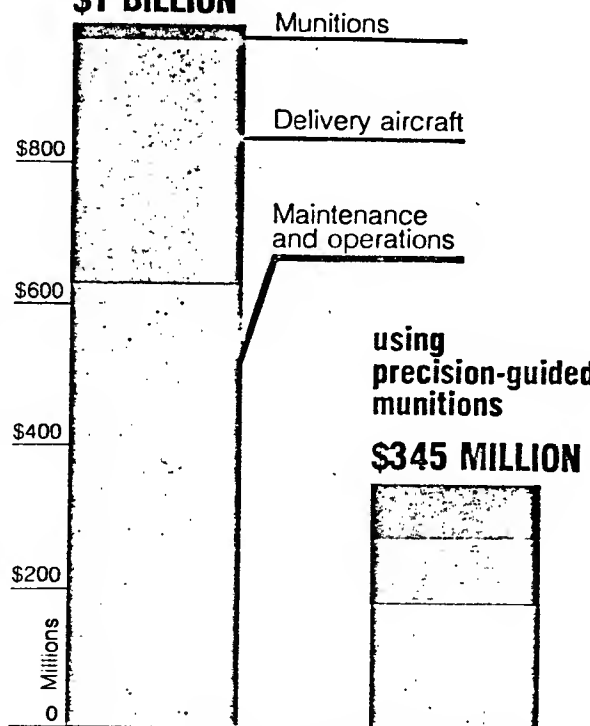
These new approaches to munitions, delivery systems, and tactics would help assure that Soviet planners cannot contrive a quick victory in Europe. A defense incorporating these approaches would also contribute greatly toward solving NATO's second great wartime challenge—gaining the edge in reinforcement and resupply. Once NATO has ensured that the invaders cannot win a quick victory over its deployed forces, the outcome of the struggle will largely depend on which side does better at keeping its own supply lines open, while disrupting the other side's flow of replacements and supplies.

It is not widely recognized how very severe NATO's problems of reinforcement and supply would be in the event of protracted war in Europe. To begin with, rates of battlefield attrition would be much higher than in World War II. What's more, Soviet submarine forces have developed formidable capacities to attack NATO's North Atlantic supply lines. The nutcracker defense, employing smaller, more efficient forces with much smaller appetites for fuel and ammunition, would greatly reduce the dimensions of the sup-

Comparative twenty-year peacetime cost of air interdiction capacity...

using
standard bombs

\$1 BILLION



ply problem by reducing the tonnages of matériel and consumables that NATO forces need in combat.

As a potentially valuable help in the battle of supply, it would be advisable for NATO to develop and acquire ship decoys—small, unmanned, radio-controlled ships of a few hundred tons. By displaying convincing "signatures" to Soviet torpedoes and missiles, these robot ships could be used during the early stages of conflict to absorb many warheads that would otherwise sink cargo ships and tankers. Again, the technology is already available.

While keeping its own supplies and reinforcements flowing, NATO must reduce and obstruct the flow to invader forces. This would be mainly a task for aircraft, and the NATO aircraft on interdiction missions would run into punishing air defenses, capable of inflicting very heavy loss rates. Accordingly, it will be extremely important to make NATO interdiction sorties count, by achieving a high ratio of targets destroyed to sorties flown. To the extent that NATO's interdiction campaign entails destroying fixed targets such as bridges and railroad junctions, it is no longer necessary to rely entirely on manned aircraft. The U.S. Tomahawk cruise missile, for example, has already demonstrated excellent accuracy. With guidance that good, surface-to-surface missile systems will be able to perform fixed-target interdiction without the aircrew losses that attend the use of manned aircraft, and at defense-budget costs far lower than for manned-aircraft forces of equal damage-inflicting capacity.

NATO aircraft employed in interdiction can greatly improve effectiveness by using accurate air munitions—air-to-ground PGM's—instead of standard air munitions, such as gravity bombs. These forces can also increase their effectiveness by directing a large portion of their efforts

against enemy vehicles on or near NATO territory, rather than against a variety of targets deep in Warsaw Pact territory. The less far NATO aircraft have to penetrate into enemy territory, the less they will be exposed to ground-based air defenses.

Such, then, are the principal lineaments of a new approach to the defense of Europe, an approach that would provide a high degree of effectiveness relative to cost, lower the probability of nuclear escalation, reduce the flow of supplies subject to attack by submarines, and offset the Soviet Union's otherwise intractable superiorities in numbers. Since most of the proposals are based on technologies that have already been demonstrated, assembling the prescriptions into a new NATO defense is more a problem of initiative and planning than of technological development. This does not mean that the task is simple. Preparing, equipping, and training new kinds of forces on a grand scale involves difficulties comparable to those that had to be overcome in placing men on the moon. On the other hand, it is the kind of task that the U.S. armed services do superbly.

With committed leadership and a spirited team effort, the U.S. defense establishment could put its full share of the proposed NATO defense improvements in place by the mid-1980's.

Barring a major push from Congress or the public, however, it is doubtful whether the Department of Defense will get moving in this direction. The Pentagon has an abundance of talented, dedicated people, but it is bound by its framework of service jurisdictions, forces, and doctrines, and cannot readily accommodate new forces and new modes of operation. Service structures and operations have evolved through combat experience, and lessons won in combat are not easily relinquished. In peacetime, the accepted way to compensate for recognized defense weak-

continued

nesses and new threats is through a managed progression of incremental advances. Working in this manner, the Pentagon system is well suited to re-equip the forces with new hardwares that operate in familiar ways, but not to assimilate new hardwares that demand new force structures and modes of operation to fulfill their potential. So the system tends to inhibit nonstandard approaches. The defense establishment, indeed, has enormous capacity to stifle change. Many proponents of new concepts have heard:

- We're already doing this.
- We're well into an approach that looks even better.
- If you had the classified data, you'd understand why we do it our way.
- It doesn't fit into any service's jurisdiction. (Try the Maritime Administration.)
- It won't work under combat conditions.
- It might work, but our allies would never agree to do it that way.
- Determined adversaries will find a way to thwart it.
- The advantages you claim for your approach will quickly be lost when our adversaries imitate it.

The final item in this list of put-offs might give readers pause. If they wanted to, after all, Soviet leaders could adopt nutcracker concepts and produce nutcracker hardware. If they were determined enough, they could in time match NATO's new equipment in quantity and perhaps in qual-

ity. Such a shift is very unlikely, however. The Soviet defense establishment is not exempt from inertia. It has enormous inventories of standard tanks, artillery, and munitions, and extensive facilities for producing more of the same. The commitment to present weapons systems is powerfully reinforced by the training of the officer corps and by deeply ingrained military doctrine.

The nutcracker plan, moreover, is essentially defensive, and therefore of relatively little value to an invader. The Soviet Union could imitate some nutcracker hardware, such as the PGM dune buggy, and apply it to offensive tactics, but any resources put into such equipment would presumably be diverted from production of additional tanks and other standard weaponry.

Most important of all, it must be borne in mind that the West now lags behind the Soviet Union in war-fighting capabilities, and has no practical plan for catching up within the present framework of military concepts and forces. If NATO moves to a nutcracker defense and Soviet leaders then try to adapt some aspects of it to their own purposes, tactics, and forces, the West will still be much better off militarily than it is today. NATO will have restored an affordable, credible, and effective defense, thereby making it less likely that the alliance will have to fight a war, and more likely that, if it has to fight, it will prevail. F

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